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 SUBJECT: Media Reaction to U.S. Special Envoy Scott Gration: The
 NCP-SPLM Deadlock

11. SUMMARY: Visible "shuttle diplomacy" between officials of the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) failed to produce a break-through by the U.S. Special Envoy to Sudan Scott Gration on his recent visit to Sudan. Media followed the impasse on two-party progress toward outstanding issues of Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) implementation. By mid-visit, local pro-government and independent print media reproduced the Special Envoy's assessment that "failure is not an option." By the visit's end, however, hope for an NCP-SPLM compromise diminished. The media gave credit to the Envoy's efforts but highlighted U.S. inability to bring the parties to an agreement. Statements in favor of secession by SPLM Chairman and Government of the Southern Sudan (GOSS) President Salva Kiir Mayardit as well as an impassioned public speech by Foreign Minister Deng Alor in Khartoum overtook most of the week's headliner stories and prompted journalists to inquire whether such statements could be seen as a violation of the CPA. END SUMMARY.

 Tactical, Yes - Strategic, No

12. Tension was already high on October 31, when the Special Envoy arrived in Sudan. The media widely reported remarks by GOSS President Salva Kiir that Saturday in Saint Teresa's Catholic Cathedral, Juba, indicating that a vote for unity was a vote for second-class citizenship. Headlines ricocheted from criticizing the new U.S. strategy on Sudan to anticipation toward mediation efforts of the U.S. delegation. Pro-government "Al Rai Al-Aam" announced, "Fresh Sudanese-American Round of Talks on Tuesday." Independent newspapers on November 2 were expectant: "The Opposition Intends to Submit a Complaint against the NCP to the Special Envoy" ("Al-Sahafa") and "Opposition Parties Write a Petition to Scott Gration" ("The Citizen"). In a same-day editorial in pro-government Al-Rai Al-Aam, entitled "Dr. Ghazi: The U. S. Deals within a Retail Sale System," the piece drew extensively from statements by Presidential Advisor Ghazi Salah Eldeen to accuse the U.S. Administration of not being "brave enough to face the active political lobbies." Combining the recent strategy roll-out and Special Envoy's visit, the article declared, "America is capable of being a negative or a positive force ... Gration's personal stance is different [from U.S. policy] and ... strives to be just within the limits of American policy." The paper quoted Ghazi on the new U.S. strategy on Sudan -- "tactical" rather than strategic -- and on America as "a selfish emperor thinking only of itself, despite Obama's claims [to the contrary] in his Cairo speech." It included Ghazi's characterization of Kiir's call for secession as the "real stance of the SPLM."

"Failure Is Not an Option"

13. In "Al-Raed," of November 8, journalist Khalid Yousif embellished on responses to an "interview" [press stakeout] with Special Envoy Gration: "I am optimistic ... we hope to see some progress. There are positive indicators. I am optimistic about unity, and there is a solution to every problem. Failure is not an option in the elections or in the referendum because the remaining time is short. I will continue to communicate with NCP and SPLM to solve disputes. The choice of the people in the elections and referendum must be respected peacefully. We are not putting pressure on any party yet.

We are going to give talks a chance." Al-Tayyar and Al-Ayaam also used the "failure is not an option" quote. Other press reports equally picked up on the Envoy's outlook of optimism early in the week and his dismissal of failure as an option. In pro-government daily "Al-Ahdath," on November 4, political analyst Mohamed Osman Omer observed that "the enthusiasm with which American Presidential Envoy to Sudan, Retired General Scott Gration, displayed towards his mission, which he started in July, is fading out in spite of his success in reducing his opponents in Washington ... The political atmosphere in Sudan, where he arrived last Friday, is not the same atmosphere he had experienced during his previous visit. The political reality has been affected by a political paralysis" The article is titled, "Washington's Strategy between Realistic Ghazi and Optimistic Gration." In addition to quoting the Special Envoy's confession of eternal optimism, the writer noted: "While the American General was on his way from Juba to Khartoum following consultations with SPLM, the First Vice President and President of the South hammered another nail on the coffin of the delicate relationship when he asked southerners to vote for separation in the referendum. These statements generated much reaction, and the NCP considered it a violation of the CPA." "Al-Ahdath," too, reported Ghazi's "frank" remark to Gration that what the United States was calling strategy "is rather just tactics, with no connecting thread between them," adding, "if the United States took seven months to pass its strategy, we will need two to three week to reply to it."

Making Secession Less Attractive

14. The visit took place amidst an uphill battle against SPLM public statements, such as that of Salva Kiir regarding how southerners might cast their votes, followed by Foreign Minister Deng Alor who, on November 4 at a United Nations symposium, added his commentary into the mix, accusing the NCP of "making secession attractive" not unity. In this climate, November 8 Paris-based online publication SudanTribune.com noted, "U.S. Envoy Departs Sudan Amid Growing NCP-SPLM Tension." The article reported that "retired General Gration left on Friday after failing to bridge differences between the two major partners in the government of National unity (GoNU)" although there had been indications earlier that the NCP and the SPLM "were close to agreeing on disputed item[s] of referendum and the census through Gration's mediation." SudanTribune.com spelled out the difficulty of defining next steps "for both parties and the U.S. administration, which is working hard to prevent the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) it helped broker from unraveling." Independent daily "The Citizen," on November 9, printed a UNMIS/Fondation Hirondelle-funded Miraya FM news report from the previous week stating that the U.S. Envoy "wraps up Sudan visit with no breakthrough in NCP-SPLM deadlock." "The Citizen" referred to "failed" mediation efforts to "resolve the deadlock between NCP and SPLM over the census results, South Sudan referendum, and national security bills." Miraya FM quoted SPLM Deputy Chairman Yassir Arman that talks would resume between the two parties on November 7 "after failure to reach compromise on Gration's proposals." A quote by leading NCP member Abdel Rahman Al-Khalifa confirmed an "understanding" on the referendum between NCP and SPLM, who were "considering proposals made by U.S. Special Envoy to resolve contested issues."

Putting the Cart before the Horse

15. Straight news articles of November 7 acknowledged attempts by the Special Envoy to move the two partners toward compromise and

flexibility. A pro-government Al-Ahdath headline on page 2 that day read, "Gration leaves without settling partner's disputes," and followed with, "Gration proposed compromising suggestions with regard to several portfolios but received no acceptance from NCP or SPLM. Both decided to go back to their parties for more consultations." Independent "Al-Tayyar" of November 7 incorporated a comment by the Special Envoy that time is limited, as "we are just few months away from elections and the referendum, and things change rapidly." The daily defined his visit focus as "easing tension between CPA partners in preparation for 2010 elections." Yet editorials that came out after his visit were critical. "Al-Ahdath" columnist Mohamed Abdel Hakam wrote on November 7, "It is clear that NEC [National Elections Commission] is carrying out its commitment to conduct elections on April 5-12, and to release the results in mid-April. This makes the practical rejection of the American proposal clear ... The Popular Congress Party (PCP), refused the American proposal of postponing elections until after the referendum. This came after Special Envoy General Scott Gration met with PCP Deputy Secretary-General Abdalla Hassan Ahmed, who said, 'we reiterated to the American Envoy that a government could not be established with technocrats only and no judiciary.'" The article is titled "The American Proposal of Postponing Elections ... A Dialogue of Putting the Cart before the Horse." A same-day article on the back-page of Al-Tayyar labelled the American proposal to postpone parliamentary elections and proceed with presidential elections "monkey's thinking," a waste of resources and of dubious outcome. Journalist Osman Mirghani opined, "It is better to conduct all elections and to give the people the best chance to express themselves. Presidential seats in the center [Khartoum] or the states would have limited effect on the masses, given that the Parliament would be appointed." Independent "Al-Ayaam" reproduced on November 5 a piece by Imad Hassan, originally published in the United Arab Emirates daily "Al-Khaleej," headlined "Sudanese-American Relations: The Long Way to Settlement." The journalist assessed the state of play between the two countries: "There is a general agreement in Washington that the United States should turn a new page with Sudan. This consensus is due to Gration's efforts to put the stick down and to wave the carrot at Khartoum. The carrot is well wrapped in stipulations and conditions that Khartoum has overlooked, concentrating instead on the cup half empty, which depends on diplomatic work and not aggressive action."

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